

watched at Blois a young girl with the dark
looks of the
South—'une beaute de quinze ans
enfantine'—singing to
her lute a song he was not to forget:

le branle de Bourgongne
Qu'elle disoit, le jour que je fus pris,

Cassandre Salviati was half French, half
Florentine. A
little later she married a neighbour of
Ronsard's home,
Jean de Peign , Seigneur de Pray—a barren
pro for the
poet, as a punning sonnet sighed. Still he had
found his
Laura, as *V amour courtois* demanded, in the
wife of another.
The *Odes* of 1550 made him the French
Pindar; *Les*
Amours of 1552 made him the French
Petrarch. Until the
present century, indeed, commentators had
imagined, as
with a sort of instinctive hatred for real life
the learned
are apt to do, notably in Shakespeare's
case, that the
object of these sonnets was herself
imaginary—an idea
as Platonic as her love. Her real identity has
however
been proved beyond cavil; the first love of
Ronsard was
an ancestress of Alfred de Musset.

But Ronsard was pure French, unlike his
mistress and
his master. His French frankness began to
stifle in the
mystic vapours of love after the Italian
convention. Not
for him a lifelong dedication to a dream,
whatever Dante
or Petrarch might have done. Even of
Petrarch he began
to have his doubts.

A voir son escrit
il estoit eveill  d'un trop gentil esprit
Pour estre sot trente ans, abusant sa
jeunesse,
Et sa Muse au giron d'une vieille maistresse;
Ou bien il jouyssoit de sa Laurette, ou bieu

il estoit un grand fat d'aimer sans avoir rien,
A little brutal? Perhaps. And yet to some
who find it
hard to read *La Vita Nuova* without a
nauseated contempt,
such healthy common sense may bring a sigh
of relief.